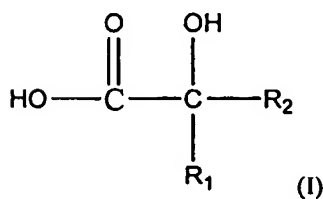


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In the Claims:

1. (Previously presented) A composition comprising a single-phase liquid or gel comprising nitrous acid, a metal nitrite and an alpha hydroxyl acid or phosphoric acid, wherein:
 - (a) the pH of the composition is stabilized at an initial value of around 3.75 or lower, or decreases from said initial value of around 3.75 or lower at the time of formulation to a value as low as around 2.5 over a period of at least about two days;
 - (b) the molar percentage of nitrite ion in the composition in the form of nitrous acid is greater than about 35% but less than about 95% of the total nitrite ions present in the composition, wherein the percent by weight of said metal nitrite in said composition ranges from about 0.01 to about 1.0; and
 - (c) the composition exhibits cidal activity against microorganisms for a period of at least two months after formulation.
2. (Original) A composition of claim 1, wherein the composition comprises a compound comprising an amount of phosphoric acid with a pKa of about 2.15 that is sufficient to lower the pH of the composition to less than about 3.75.
3. (Previously presented) A composition of claim 1, wherein the alpha hydroxyl acid is a compound of the formula (I):



wherein R₁ and R₂ may be the same or different and may be selected from the group consisting of hydrogen, methyl, -CH₂ COOH, -CH₂ COO⁻, -CH₂ OH, -CHOHCOOH, -C₆ H₅ , and -CH₂ C₆ H₅.

4. (Previously presented) A composition of claim 1, wherein the composition further comprises one or more of the following: a surfactant, a chelating agent, an effervescent compound, and a thickener.
5. (Previously presented) A composition of claim 1, wherein the cidal activity of the composition over a period of about twenty-four months or more after formulation is the same or greater than the activity that it demonstrated initially.